

Bioterrorism

Questions and Answers

Q. Where can I get vaccine for protection against anthrax and smallpox?

A. Anthrax vaccine currently is not recommended for the public for protection against bioterrorism.

It is limited to researchers, people who may be exposed to anthrax spores in their occupations and the military.

Smallpox vaccine is limited to researchers who may be working with smallpox-like viruses. Laboratories in Russia and at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta contain the only known sources of smallpox virus in the world. **Smallpox vaccine currently is not recommended for the public for protection against bioterrorism.**

Q. I have heard that antibiotics will provide protection against anthrax and smallpox. Where can I get these antibiotics to protect myself?

A. Antibiotics are not effective against viruses. Since a virus causes smallpox, antibiotics cannot provide protection against smallpox. If bacteria such as anthrax were used by bioterrorists, antibiotics would be prescribed for up to 60 days for people who were exposed.

Antibiotics are not recommended to be taken for protection against bioterrorism. All medications, including antibiotics, can have side effects. Taking antibiotics without a valid medical reason increases the risk of side effects and also may kill beneficial bacteria. Furthermore, taking antibiotics without a valid medical reason may cause bacteria to become resistant to the antibiotic. This may lead to the antibiotic not being effective when it is necessary.

Q. I've heard that people living in Israel carry masks for protection against terrorism. Should I purchase a mask or respirator for protection against terrorism?

A. It is likely that a terrorist would release a biological or chemical agent without warning. Therefore, a person would be exposed to the agent before the mask would provide any protective benefit. Masks or respirators also make breathing more difficult. Therefore, wearing a mask or respirator increases the possibility that a person might experience respiratory problems as a result of wearing the mask. Proper use of a mask or respirator also requires fit testing and maintenance. An improperly fitted mask actually may increase the breathing in of hazardous substances.

Masks or respirators are not recommended for use by the public for protection against bioterrorism.

Q. What is being done for protection against biological and chemical terrorism?

A. Planning has been conducted and is continuing at the local, state and national levels to protect the public against biological and chemical terrorism. If a bioterrorism event occurs, information will be provided to the public about protective measures and the use and distribution of antibiotics and, if necessary, vaccines.

Q. What can the public do?

A. It is important for the public to be vigilant and aware of happenings in your community and neighborhood. Suspicious acts or unattended packages should be reported to law enforcement officials. Finally, take good care of yourself. Eat right, exercise and get sufficient hours of sleep.

Q. Where can I find more information about bioterrorism?

A. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has an excellent website that provides information about bioterrorism at www.bt.cdc.gov. Questions also may be directed to the North Dakota Department of Health by calling 800.472.2180.